



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLARD CARROLL

Wagon Wheel Park skating rink and dance hall, located at 3010 N.E. Third Ave., in Camas, was completed in 1948. It was made of fir tree logs and included a river rock fireplace, which still stands inside the building today.

**By HEATHER ACHESON**  
*Post-Record Staff*

**I**n its heyday during the late 1940s and 1950s, the Wagon Wheel Park skating rink and dance hall was the "rock-in' place to be" on Saturday nights in Camas.

While the venue located on Northeast Third Avenue on the banks of the Washougal River was a skating rink on the weekdays, on Friday nights it began its transformation.

Willard Carroll worked at the venue owned by his uncle, Pat Mason. He remembers climbing up a ladder and changing the individual sheet metal letters outside each week from the word "S-K-A-T-I-N-G" to "D-A-N-C-I-N-G."

Carroll would then head inside to help set up the 20 by 30 foot stage, and put "dance wax" on the floor to prepare for the hundreds of people who would be

descending on the hall for an evening of fun the next day.

"There could be as many as 500 to 600 people there on a Saturday night," Carroll said during a recent interview.

A variety of bands, singers and dancers entertained the crowds. And these weren't just small-time locally known acts. According to Carroll's daughter, Sheri Phares, some of the guest performers included the era's top names in country music like singer and actor Tex Ritter; pianist, composer and arranger Stan Kenton; Disney composer and tuba and brass instrumentalist George Bruns; and singer Willie Nelson, who at the time had also worked as a disc jockey at KVAN radio station in Portland.

"Willie got his start in the Wagon Wheel; then Pat became his agent," Phares said.

Today, the building that was once a hot spot has

been vacant since July 2007 and has fallen into severe disrepair. So much so that its current owners will have it leveled as part of a Saturday, March 24 training burn conducted by the Camas Fire Department. To date, no plans for the construction of a new structure on the site have been submitted to the City of Camas by owners Marwan and Jacqueline Bahu and Howard and Lorena Reser.

**"It was a beautiful building."**

Mason, a former promoter with Nashville's Grand Ole Opry road shows, began construction on the building in 1947. It was made of stripped fir logs cut to be uniform in size then stacked. When complete, it was quite a unique sight.

**"It was a really beautiful See Wagon Wheel Park, page B6**



Roller skating shows were a popular feature at Wagon Wheel Park.



This sign once marked the site of the roller skating rink and dance hall.

Just as Pat Mason was getting ready to open Wagon Wheel Park, the Memorial Day flood of 1948 hit. He led the construction of a 10-foot tall dike to protect his new building from flood waters.



Ed Margeson (above) works on the Wagon Wheel Park construction site in 1947. Owned by Pat Mason, a concert promoter, it was completed in 1948 and became a popular spot particularly on Saturday nights when touring bands performed.